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Creators	Bestley, Russ and Burgess, Paul

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## **Fan Artefacts and Doing it Themselves: The home-made graphics of punk devotees**

Russ Bestley, London College of Communication and Paul Burgess, University of Brighton

### **Abstract**

*Punk's embrace of autonomous, do-it-yourself, artistic production has been widely documented as a key element of the punk 'explosion'. At times, however, the rhetoric has exceeded the actual practice, and the boundary between DIY authorship and professional production has become blurred. Though much early punk visual material was indeed raw, rough and ready, and often appeared to run counter to any kind of formal aesthetic criteria in respect to design or taste, it was also widely the product of trained graphic designers and illustrators with a keen awareness of the appropriate visual language required to reflect a new, self-styled, anarchic and polemical subculture. Even many of the celebrated 'do-it-yourself' punk pioneers relied on access to professional services for reproduction, including printers, pre-press art workers and record sleeve manufacturers. However, much like the punks who chose to make their own outfits, rather than buy 'official' clothing from the burgeoning punk boutique (and mail order) market, some fans and enthusiasts attempted to create their own punk graphics, or decided to adopt a naïve model of détournement in order to adapt or personalise jackets, shirts, school bags, scrapbooks and even record sleeves within their own collections. These home made artefacts can be viewed as products of subcultural participation and belonging, as an individual's response to punk's call to arms and as markers of possession. They may also help us to better understand an underlying, distilled and unmediated interpretation of punk's 'natural' visual language.*

### **Keywords**

Punk, graphic design, collage, détournement, DIY, fan art

### **Punk and Design – The Official Story**

As an early London Weekend Television documentary on the UK punk rock phenomenon, first broadcast on 28 November 1976, indicated, part of the subculture's philosophy revolved around the idea of participation and the levelling of hierarchies between performer and audience. Presenter Janet Street-Porter's narration attempted to get to grips with the basic principles of punk as a do-it-yourself model of subcultural participation, "There's also a new feeling that you don't have to be a special sort of person to pick up a guitar, or stand in front of a mic and sing. In punk rock, anyone can have a go." (LWT 1976). However, in practice such hierarchies were harder to budge, particularly outside the realm of punk performance (Bestley 2018), though even here the mythology only briefly outweighed the brutal reality that some musicians were simply more capable, or more interesting, than others.

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Fig.01 Clothing advertisements, *New Musical Express*, November 1977 and July 1978.

Just over a year later, *LWT* revisited the subculture with a longer programme entitled *The Year of Punk*, drawing on some of the same footage as the original feature, but now accompanied by clips of bands performing live at the Roxy and Vortex punk clubs in London over the previous year. Street-Porter once again highlighted punk's anyone can do it philosophy, though with the benefit of hindsight she also offered something of a critical reflection, "*Another fundamental part of punk's attraction was the belief that anyone could be a musician. This was exciting for the punk fans, but it naturally led to some rather basic performances.*" (*LWT* 1978)

By now, punk music was big business, and the down-to-earth, street-level narrative was perhaps more of a mechanism for selling commodities through a sense of supposed authenticity than a practical manifesto for wider participation (Dale 2012). There is, of course, a tension here between





Fig.02 Original Sex Pistols logo designed by Helen Wellington-Lloyd, 1976.

punk as attitude and ideology and punk as a new and distinct form of popular music; between a philosophical approach to the subculture and the consumer-driven, traditional music industry that saw an opportunity to access emerging markets and new audiences. Certainly when it came to punk 'products' – records, clothing, promotional material – the more traditional business-led operations of branding, marketing, professional design and copyright held sway (Bestley 2018, Dale 2018). Punk clothes, always displaying a tension between the punk high fashion of Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren and the charity shop adaptations and home-made, do-it-yourself outfits of many early fans, also witnessed a boom in copycat items sold by smaller traders and mail order sellers advertising in the back pages of the music press (Fig.01).

### **Raw Power: Punk Aesthetics**

Like the music itself, one significant benefit afforded participants and followers through the evolution of new aesthetics and punk visual styles arose from their apparent simplicity. Fans could mimic punk graphics with relative ease – the 'ransom note' typography pioneered by Helen Wellington-Lloyd for early Sex Pistols flyers and subsequently refined to a coherent punk brand aesthetic by Jamie Reid, the graphic collages of Linder Sterling and photocopied gig flyers by Barry Jones and Adam Ant, along with the fanzine styles pioneered by Mark P, Tony Moon and others provided a template for untrained and inexperienced amateurs to follow;

Certain punk maxims are widely accepted and professed by a significant majority of participants in the subculture, and some stereotypes exist for good reason – punk's association with a *do-it-yourself* ideal and the notion of autonomy, empowerment



and a rejection of traditional hierarchies is a commonly accepted trope, with *DIY* embedded in many definitions of the subculture. (Bestley 2017: 17-18)

Of course, things were never that simple in practice – Helen Wellington-Lloyd designed the very first Sex Pistols logo (Fig.02), and her early gig flyers for the Sex Pistols were born out of necessity. Often produced in the same room (a flat in 93 Bell Street, Marylebone, London) as Malcolm McLaren and Nils Stevenson, whilst they looked over her shoulder and shouted out changes and suggestions, Wellington-Lloyd would use material that was lying around and inexpensive. She would frequently reuse old flyers (often working on the back), cutting out type from tabloid newspapers or lettering from previous flyers, using felt pens, Letraset and old press photos (Fig.03 & Fig.04). As James Stafford later summarised in his deconstruction of the cover design for the Sex Pistols debut album, *Never Mind the Bollocks*, there is some disagreement among the band's former management and supporters as to where the 'ransom-note' typographic style originated;

McLaren claimed his roommate, Helen Wellington Lloyd, was helping him make flyers and "couldn't be bothered" to purchase Letraset. In the days before editing software, Letraset's sheets of press-on letters were the go-to for graphic designers who needed to add text to an image. Rather than run down to the shop and buy a sheet, Lloyd simply cut letters out of the newspaper and the ransom note look was born. "It just goes to show the best ideas are not always consciously formed," said McLaren. "It fitted the anti-commercial attitude of the band perfectly." (Stafford 2015)

Jamie Reid, however, suggested that the style dated back to his work at Suburban Press in the early 1970s, where '...we had to produce cheap (no money), fast, and effective visuals, so collage was the dominant look; things cut out from papers and magazines – photos and lettering – which was the so-called 'blackmail punk' look, which looked great.' (Stewart 2015)

In respect to Helen Wellington-Lloyd's early logo designs, designer Paul Burgess used Wellington-Lloyd's original artwork as the basis for the film poster design for Julien Temple's documentary, *The Filth and the Fury: A Sex Pistols Film*, released in 2000 (Fig.05). Upon the film's release, Wellington-Lloyd was overjoyed to see her artwork finally used publicly and given the recognition, and credit, it deserved.

Later, Jamie Reid and Linder Sterling's designs were far more carefully considered and composed than might first appear to the untrained eye, while access to simple tools for reproduction like the photocopier was often difficult, if not impossible for many non-professional designers.

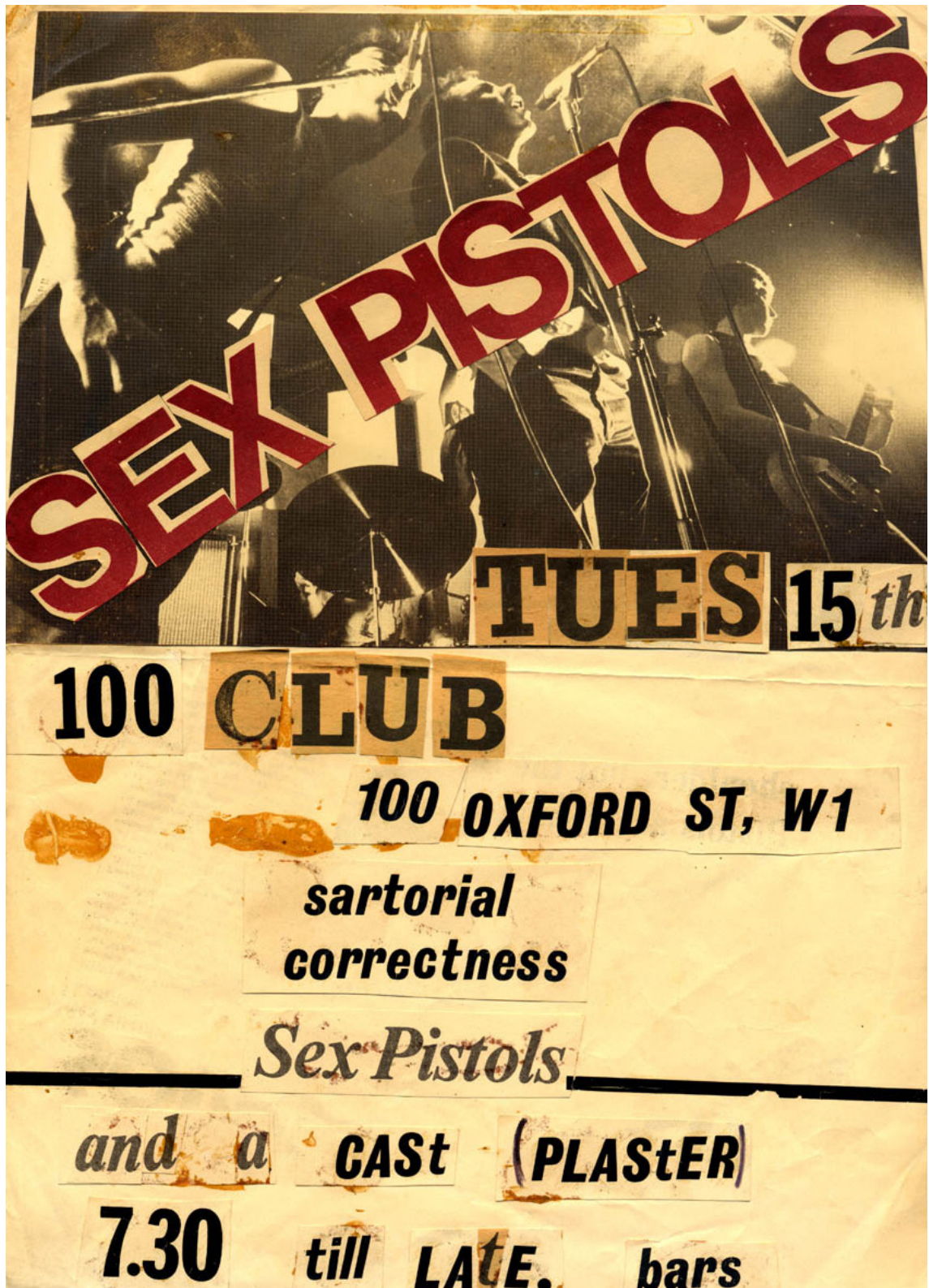


Fig.03 Sex Pistols 100 Club gig flyer, original paste-up artwork designed by Helen Wellington-Lloyd, 1976.





Fig.04 Sex Pistols Screen on the Green gig flyer, designed by Helen Wellington-Lloyd, 1976.



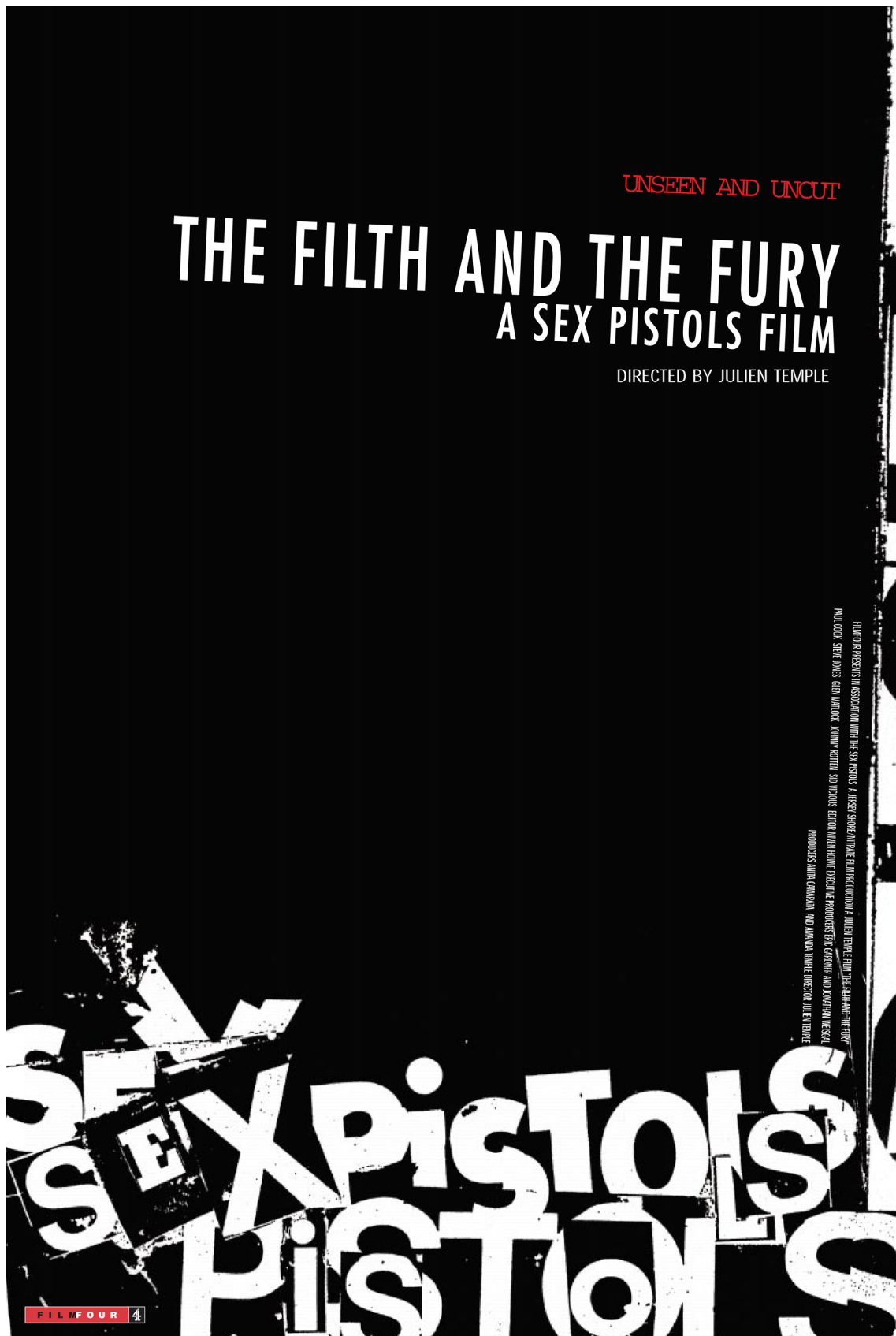


Fig.05 Poster for *The Filth and the Fury: A Sex Pistols Film* (2000), designed by Paul Burgess.



Fig.07a and Fig.07b Sex Pistols (1977), 'Pretty Vacant' (single), Virgin Records. Home-made picture sleeve, front and back cover, designer unknown.



Fig.08a and Fig.08b Sex Pistols (1977), 'Holidays in the Sun' (single), Virgin Records. Home-made picture sleeve, front and back cover, designer unknown.

One obvious and direct impact of these restrictions in terms of both expertise and access can be observed in the use (or absence) of relative scaling between visual elements within a composition. Reid's 'ransom note' typography was in reality carefully balanced, with the size and weight of individual characters set in such a way as to create harmony (or, at times, deliberate disharmony), while Sterling utilised careful composition in order to retain a sense of unity to the photomontages she created. In short, Sterling's images and Reid's typeset words could each be read as one single piece (a picture, a word), despite the fragmented nature of the individual elements employed in their construction. The treatment of graphic material through photo-mechanical processes was key to the practice of design, as Malcolm Garrett later recalled; "*at Chloride I had access to a photocopier, a relatively rare facility at that time, which I used to scale the image to the correct size.*" (Brook & Shaughnessy 2016: 10-11). The designer goes on to note





Fig.09 The Ruts (1979), 'In A Rut' (single), People Unite Records. Home-made sleeve, designer unknown. another useful graphic treatment afforded by the technology, in relation to tonal balance and texture;

Given that we only had two colours to work with (record company budgets were very restrictive for seven inch single sleeves), reducing the image to monochrome using the photocopier was both a necessity and a bonus. It imbued the image with what I thought was a pleasing texture, and of course facilitated its reduction to one colour for printing. (Brook & Shaughnessy 2016: 11).

For amateurs working without access to such tools for resizing visual elements or for harmonising texture and tone between graphic material from different sources, the end result was often far more blunt, displaying its fragmented origins rather than a coherent 'whole'. These distinctions became even more pronounced when working with more than one colour. Skilled visual



communicators not only understood how to employ sympathetic or contrasting colour palettes and tonal differences, they were able to layer print colours to create sophisticated visual effects – amateur designers usually lacked the experience to handle such complexities.

Many punk seven-inch singles, particularly those produced by the major labels, were issued with a limited edition picture sleeve for the first pressing, with ensuing copies in a plain, or generic record company, bag. Some first pressings were also released on coloured vinyl, creating instant collectors' items, though this led to a drop in demand for the second editions among discriminating buyers and the rapidly expanding punk record collectors' market. This collectability, and the desire for first-issue authenticity, led to something of a conundrum: the punk subculture had espoused a do-it-yourself ideal, and had taken an overt rhetorical position that rejected the hierarchies of marketing and consumerism, but many punk fans were still chasing a product through which authenticity was defined by means of manufactured scarcity.

Other picture sleeves became scarce for different reasons. The design for the Sex Pistols' fourth single 'Holidays in the Sun' (October 1977) was an adaptation of a holiday brochure produced by the Belgian Travel Service. Jamie Reid took the comic strip story of a family enjoying their holiday, re-arranged the sequence in an irregular grid, and simply replaced the words in the speech balloons with the lyrics of the song – ending with a frame of a smiling young couple alongside the song's opening lyrical refrain, "a cheap holiday in other peoples misery" (Reid & Savage 1987, Kugelberg, Savage & Terry 2016). Glitterbest management and Virgin Records were presented with an injunction by the owners of the plagiarised tourist brochure, and the sleeve was withdrawn, with Reid being required to destroy the artwork in the presence of the company's solicitor. The single was subsequently issued in a plain white record bag, and quickly dropped out of the charts, with the original sleeve becoming a collectors' item. A similar fate beset Reid's artwork for the Sex Pistols 'The Great Rock 'N' Roll Swindle' single released two years later: the sleeve featured a mock Sex Pistols credit card copied directly from the American Express design. Once again, Virgin were forced to withdraw the sleeve, though not before around 80,000 copies had been sold.

### **Imitation, Pastiche, Détournement and Personalisation**

Illustrator and university lecturer Paul Burgess has amassed a collection of punk-related ephemera centred on fan-art, personalisation and graphic intervention. Many of the items featured here are far from collectable in terms of either economic value or cultural capital – record collectors are generally not interested in material that was not officially produced for a band or label – while 'mint' condition original sleeves are highly prized, those that have been written on, adapted or simply put together by anonymous individuals as personal items lack any sense of commercial value in the market for rare records. Equally, curated collections tend to focus on the provenance

of the artefact, the cultural and historical status of the group or artist, and (often to a lesser extent) the designer of the cover. Since the creators of most of these examples are long lost to the mists of time, and in any case they display little in the way of artistic merit or sophistication, they occupy something of a hinterland between desirable artefacts and mutilated detritus.

They do, however, offer the design historian a fascinating insight into the ways in which a set of stylistic visual conventions relating to 'punk graphics' filtered down to punk fans and were emulated by amateur designers. Imitation may be the sincerest form of flattery, but the raw and ready nature of these graphic objects – as pastiche or homage, rather than offering any sense of parodic intent – might help us to understand the essential nature of a punk visual aesthetic, at least in the United Kingdom at a certain moment in time. To some extent, many of these artefacts mirror the 'original' one-off, hand-rendered, layered collage work of Reid et al, which in itself is highly prized by major cultural institutions including the Victoria & Albert Museum, rather than the subsequently mass-produced graphic material that was, in part, the outcome of the printing process as well as the hand of the 'artist'. Walter Benjamin's notion of 'aura' and the authenticity of the original artefact might be referenced in relation to the cultural (and economic) capital afforded the material collected by the V&A, though it may be something of a stretch to apply it to these rudimentary examples of untrained, and often less-than-competent, mimicking of a 'punk aesthetic'; *"One might subsume the eliminated element in the term "aura" and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art."* (Robinson 2013: II). Henry Jenkins' seminal work on fan art, *Textual Poachers*, may also offer the academic researcher and design historian a model for analysis;

Fan-generated texts cannot simply be interpreted as the material traces of interpretative acts but need to be understood within their own terms as cultural artefacts. They are aesthetic objects which draw on the artistic traditions of the fan community as well as on the personal creativity and insights of individual consumer/artists. [...] In short, a poached culture requires a conception of aesthetics emphasizing borrowing and recombination as much or more as original creation and artistic innovation. (Jenkins 1992: 223-224)

The limited availability of some picture sleeves – intentional or otherwise – afforded not only greater economic and cultural value to the records themselves, but perhaps encouraged something of a punk do-it-yourself backlash. Personalised and customised sleeves could be seen as both an imitation of original, professionally designed picture sleeves (a tribute), or as a critique of limited edition strategies and blatant, commercially-driven marketing methods (an authentic punk critical discourse). The Sex Pistols commented on the same process in their scathing attack on

EMI Records, following their short-lived contract with the label; “*Unlimited edition / With an unlimited supply / That was the only reason / We all had to say goodbye*” (Sex Pistols 1977). The very act of personalisation also helped to secure ownership of a record: within a subculture largely centred on the lives and activities of young people, the sharing and pooling of resources – records played at parties or in youth clubs and school common rooms, for instance – meant that markers of personal property were more common. In many cases that might mean carefully inscribed initials on the label or back cover of a record, but perhaps more exaggerated visual decoration could lead to more immediate recognition.

The fact that punk widely celebrated the notion of ‘do-it-yourself’, the untrained and the spirited amateur as key principles in performance, musical composition and visual communication encouraged fans to adopt a similar palette of design approaches and methods. Two of the simplest methods, at least in principle, reflected Helen Wellington-Lloyd and Jamie Reid’s early graphics for the Sex Pistols – the use of collage and ‘ransom note’ typography. Some fans took a relatively sophisticated approach to constructing replacement picture sleeves: Figures 07a/07b and 08a/08b show home-made picture sleeves for singles by the Sex Pistols which use carefully trimmed images and text from advertisements (for the same records) in the music press, thus operating in parallel with the ‘official’ graphic identity of the group created by Reid. Other examples follow a similar approach, employing ‘ransom note’ typography along with hand-rendered lettering mirroring the aesthetic exemplified by *Sniffin’ Glue* and other leading fanzines (Figures 09-13b). Figure 10a/10b, a hand-made sleeve for the Alternative TV flexidisc ‘Love Lies Limp’, which was given away with issue 12 of *Sniffin’ Glue* fanzine and never issued with a picture cover, demonstrates some consideration of both typography and image through a collage of photographs of punk fans at The Roxy club in Covent Garden, London, and some carefully selected and cut out type. Several examples included here feature the same Sex Pistols single, ‘Holidays in the Sun’, which was widely distributed without its original picture sleeve following a legal injunction. Interestingly, in Figure 11a/11b, the designer has appropriated Reid’s standard Sex Pistols ‘logo’ from a press advertisement, and has chosen to hand-render an approximation of ‘ransom-note’ lettering for the record’s title rather than continue the exhaustive process of cutting out and assembling individual characters as featured on the reverse, ‘Satellite’. Whether this change of approach arose from a lack of available resources, or through expedience or boredom, it is impossible to know. The use of type correction fluid to render titles on Figures 14a and 14b is innovative and actually very effective – particularly in the deliberate dismissal of either grid or hierarchy on the reverse. This example actually re-uses the plain red sleeve from the debut single by the Rich Kids, ‘Rich Kids’, as its base.

Some designs were less technical in nature. The designer in Figure 15a/15b has simply chosen to brighten up Jamie Reid’s original black and white sleeve for the Sex Pistols’ third single,



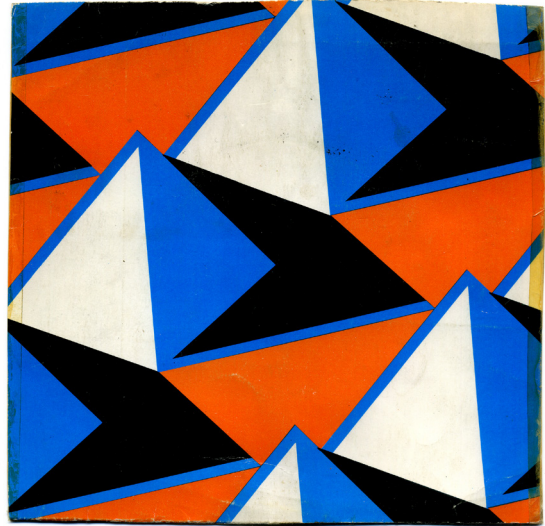


Fig.10a and Fig.10b Alternative TV (1977), 'Love Lies Limp' (flexidisc), Deptford Fun City Records. Home-made picture sleeve, front and back cover, designer unknown.

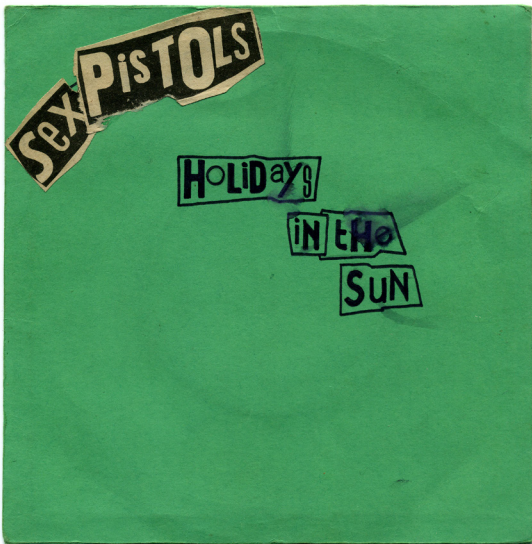


Fig.11a and Fig.11b Sex Pistols (1977), 'Holidays in the Sun' (single), Virgin Records. Home-made sleeve, front and back cover, designer unknown.

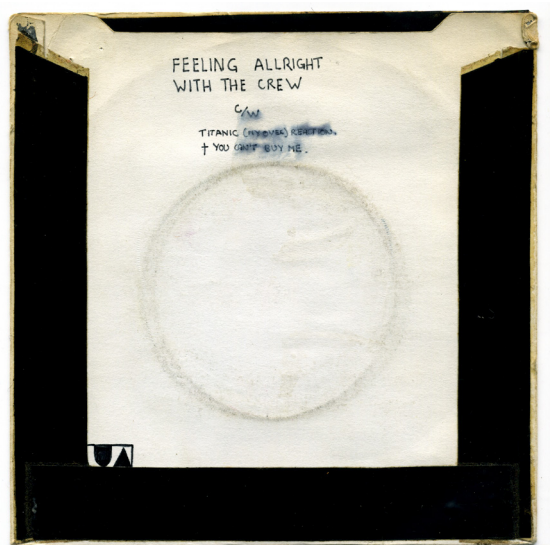
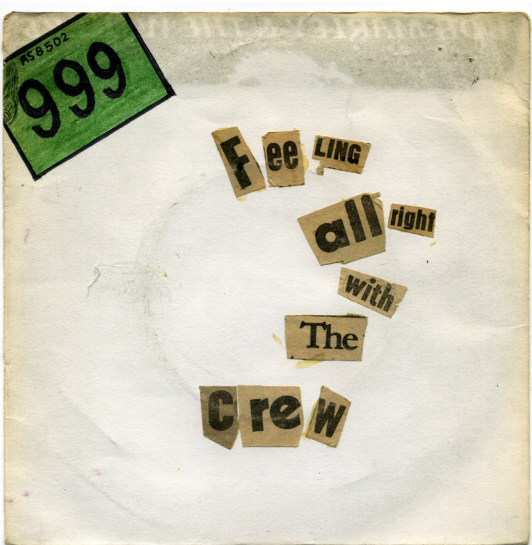


Fig.12a and Fig.12b Nine Nine Nine (1978), 'Feelin' Alright With The Crew' (single), United Artists Records. Home-made sleeve, front and back cover, designer unknown.



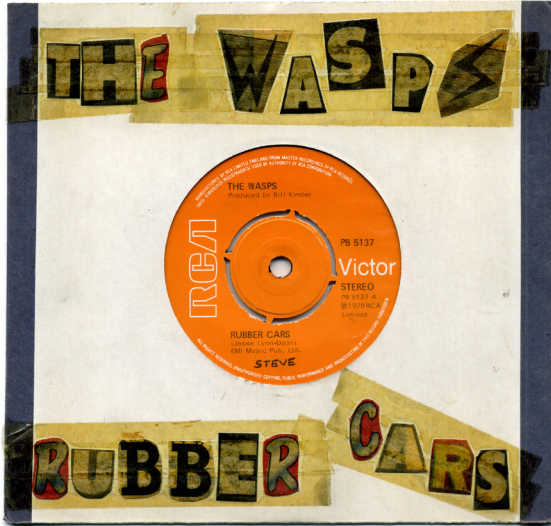


Fig.13a and Fig.13b The Wasps (1979), 'Rubber Cars' (single), RCA Records. Home-made sleeve, front and back cover, designer unknown.

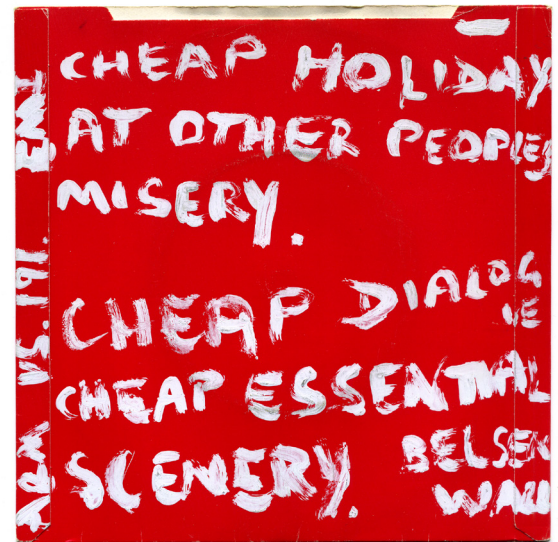
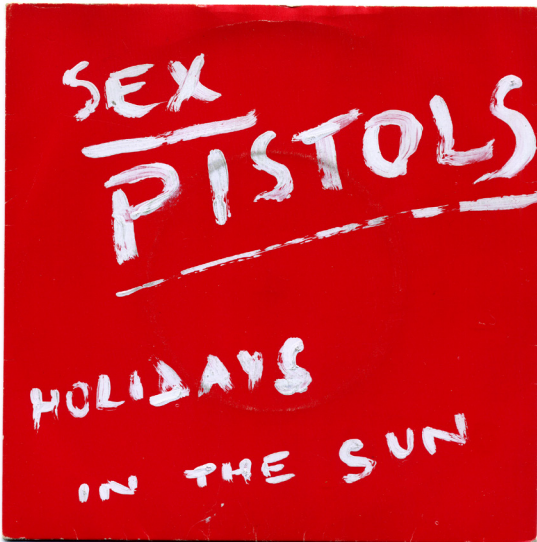


Fig.14a and Fig.14b Sex Pistols (1977), 'Holidays in the Sun' (single), Virgin Records. Home-made sleeve, front and back cover, designer unknown.



Fig.15a and Fig.15b Sex Pistols (1977), 'Pretty Vacant' (single), Virgin Records. Coloured-in picture sleeve, front and back cover, designer unknown (original sleeve design by Jamie Reid).





Fig.16a and Fig.16b Rich Kids (1978), 'Rich Kids' (single), EMI Records. Détourned sleeve, front and back cover, designer unknown.



Fig.17a and Fig.17b Sex Pistols (1977), 'Holidays in the Sun' (single), Virgin Records. Home-made sleeve, front and back cover, designer unknown.

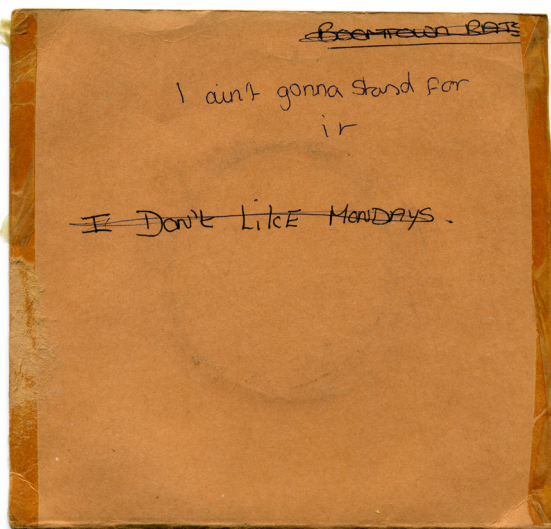


Fig.18 Boomtown Rats (1979), 'I Don't Like Mondays' (single), Ensign Records. Home-made sleeve, designer unknown. Fig.19 Sex Pistols (1977), 'Anarchy in the UK' (single), Glitterbest Records. Home-made sleeve, designer unknown.





Fig.20 Sex Pistols (1977), 'Holidays in the Sun' (single), Virgin Records. Détourned sleeve, back cover, designer unknown. Fig.21 Sex Pistols (1977), 'God Save The Queen' (single), Virgin Records. Détourned sleeve, designer unknown.

'Pretty Vacant', by colouring in various elements of the front and back with felt-tip pens. Figures 16a-17b all employ hand-rendering to various degrees of (un)sophistication – the designer in Figure 16a has added the name of the group, Rich Kids, to the standard issue plain red sleeve, while in Figure 17a the designer has attempted to mimic the generic 'ransom-note' style using felt-tip pens, and has even gone to the trouble to attempt a copy of the Virgin Records logo on the back (Fig.17b).<sup>i</sup> Others chose to write or draw on the cover and to comment on the content of the record itself. Figures 18 and 19 include additional commentary beyond the title of the record and name of the artist: a plain brown card sleeve features the title of a single by the Boomtown Rats, 'I Don't Like Mondays', which has been crossed out and the phrase "I ain't gonna stand for it" added instead, while a generic white card record bag housing a French copy of the debut Sex Pistols single, 'Anarchy in the UK' features hand-lettered names of famous early female punk participants – Helen of Troy and Sue Catwomen [sic]. In Figure 20, Reid's 'Nice People' image – originally published by Suburban Press and re-used on the back cover of the Sex Pistols' 'Holidays in the Sun' – features a direct response from its designer-détourner, "nice gesture but no fun yuggh!" with the word "fascists" and the group's name written above. Figure 21 features the Pistols' 'God Save The Queen' single in a generic Epic company sleeve (not original to the record, which was issued by Virgin Records) with the additional handwritten text in biro, "God save the old bag", a comment suggesting overt humour and a form of audience participation.

The larger scale and flat colours of the cover of the debut Sex Pistols album, *Never Mind The Bollocks*, provide ample room for graphic intervention, as in Figures 22-24. The designer in Figure 22 has added a particularly innovative graphic commentary on the title of the record



Figs.22-24 Sex Pistols (1977), *Never Mind The Bollocks* (album), Virgin Records. Examples of album cover détournement, designer unknown.





Fig.25 Sex Pistols (1978), *Live in Texas* bootleg album, front cover. Designer unknown.

and the subsequent media outrage: the word 'Bollocks' is obscured with the word 'censored', and a small press clipping citing the reaction of a Catholic priest in Wales to a local gig by the group in December 1976 has been attached with Sellotape below. Interestingly, the individual ransom-note letters have been chosen to closely match the size and weight of the words 'Never Mind' above, demonstrating some care and attention on the part of the designer. Figures 23 and 24 feature far more rudimentary adaptations, with hand-drawn figures and objects added to the original cover. The 'Sid' cartoon in Figure 23 has been copied from the poster for the 1980 Sex Pistols film *The Great Rock 'N' Roll Swindle*, placing its owner and fan 'designer' in a period some time after the album's original release, while the additional elements in Figure 24 include anonymous figures, safety pins, chains and a syringe.

Other albums provided a completely clean window for creative decoration. The first pressing of the notorious Sex Pistols bootleg album, *Spunk*, was issued in a plain white cover. Some

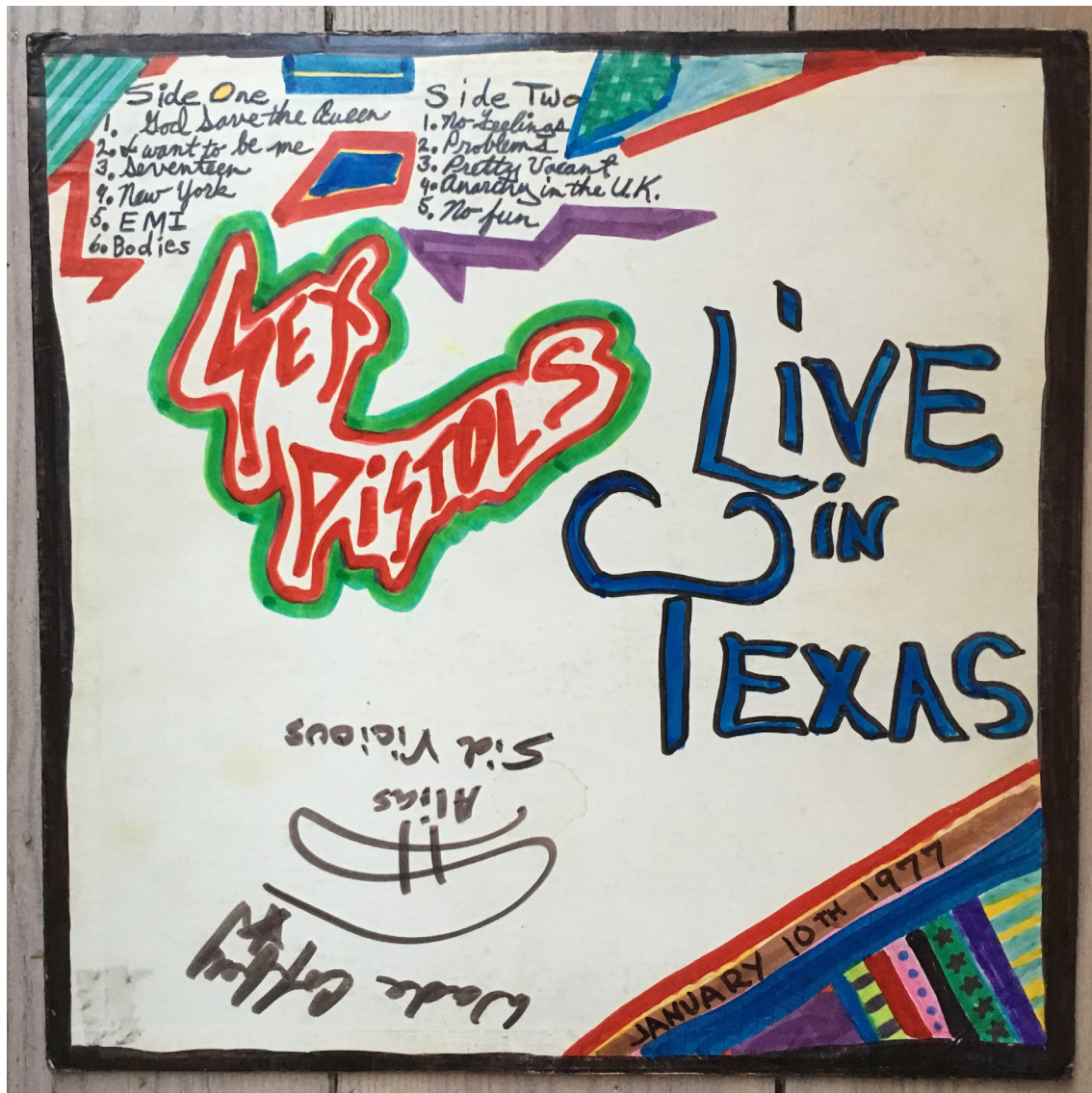


Fig.26 Sex Pistols (1978), *Live in Texas* bootleg album, back cover. Designer unknown.

examples were stencilled and spray painted prior to sale, while many were left blank and saw fans adding their own text or images.<sup>ii</sup> A later bootleg recording of a gig by the band, purporting to have been recorded on 10th January 1977 (which is an error, since the band only played Texas twice, both dates in January 1978 – this recording presumably dates from their performance at the Longhorn Ballroom in Dallas on January 10th 1978) is featured in Figures 25 and 26. Again, most of the text has been hand-rendered, including a rather inventive longhorn ‘T’ in Texas on the reverse, but the front cover also features large black arrows, lines and Letraset numerals as background decoration, including the letters EMI – the band’s former label and the subject of scathing critique in one of their songs.

### Curating Punk Artefacts

As punk matured, and curators, archivists and museums began to accumulate items for historical and cultural collections, a hierarchy of originality, authenticity and provenance re-emerged.



Clothes from McLaren and Westwood's shops (Let it Rock, SEX and Seditious) were highly prized, and have become important punk artefacts within prestigious collections, while the cheaper 'copy' products sold through more generic pop culture fashion outlets in London and a network of small punk boutiques across the UK have largely disappeared. The personalised, customised and home-made items created by young punk fans in response to the subculture's apparent anti-fashion call-to-arms were often attributed little or no cultural status, and few examples remain beyond photographs from clubs such as The Roxy in London or within personal collections held by punk fans themselves. This point was discussed by Nicola Clayton in her 2002 thesis on what she termed the modernist paradigm within British museums;

Only certain aspects of subcultures are being recorded: in particular the two dimensional, such as photos and ephemera (mostly collected by social history departments), and subcultural dress (collected by costume departments). (Clayton 2002: 271)

Such limitations also helped to confer a sense of authenticity onto certain artefacts, often those associated with more 'popular' and commercially successful design styles and conventions, while at the same time precluding more personal forms of engagement and the responses of individuals within the subculture;

Notions of authenticity are particularly paradoxical: authenticity is located here within the genuineness of an item to its adherence to a stereotypical or essentialist subcultural identity, not in its genuineness as an object used by a subculturalist. (Clayton 2002: 223)

Part of Clayton's thesis focussed on fashion and clothing styles, and the ways in which museums tended to base collections and exhibition displays on supposedly iconic stereotypes, rather than the myriad approaches to subcultural participation employed by individuals. Such attitudes often reflected the depiction of subcultural styles within the media, as Monica Sklar notes, "*the popular press often creates a punk caricature reducing dress to a costume rather than a significant part of a lifestyle filled with humour, anger, art, and practical functionality.*" (Sklar 2013: 23). However, there are notable exceptions, where contemporary museum curators seek to highlight the importance of everyday and ephemeral material, and an increasing interest in audiences, receivers and participants within cultural movements and scenes has led to some more inclusive approaches, as Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections Curator Stephanie Boydell suggests;

Museums and galleries are now fully signed up to the idea that they need to appeal to

a wide range of users. They no longer see themselves in the mould of the dictatorial tastemaker, representing a monolithic view of ideas and identities. (Boydell 2018)

Boydell suggests that the impact of new historical methods, reflecting more closely the diversity and experience of researchers and audiences, has played a part in growing interest in disposable, mass-produced and even home-made material;

Studies in cultural ephemera form the basis of many new histories. The throw-away, the mass produced and the home-made are now accepted as genuine fields of academic study. This is evidenced in the collecting of ephemeral material in university collections, such as the University of Reading's poster and typography collections, the John Johnson Collection at the Bodleian Library, Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections; and the establishment of the Centre for Ephemera Studies at Reading University. (Boydell 2018)

This is a relatively recent phenomenon within museums – Boydell goes on to note that *"it was only in the early twentieth century that the folk museum, and the study of folk art, became accepted as a valid, academic, subject area."* (Boydell 2018). There are, equally, tensions arising from the curation of what may have been originally oppositional or subversive material, as Boydell and Malcolm Garrett reflected in their presentation at the Punk Scholars Network Conference in Bolton, December 2017; *"I think [exhibiting pop culture artefacts] says perhaps more about a curating culture that is more liberal and experimental than ever before, but in doing so, has it undermined the original anti-establishment intentions of the creators?"* (Boydell & Garrett 2017).

Similarly, while publishers have reproduced ephemeral material within books aimed at collectors and the broader nostalgia market (covering everything from old postcards to advertisements, catalogue illustrations and listings, packaging, lettering and signage), such material has not generally been the subject of academic enquiry. This approach to the critical analysis of what might be seen as less desirable or 'high quality' objects has parallels in other fields, and reflects a change in academic discourse centred on the history of the lives of 'ordinary' people;

In archaeological studies, it is well established that the collection and study of the detritus and rubbish of a site can tell us a great deal about a site or people, so why would this not be the case for contemporary culture, particularly when there is so much more that is thrown away? (Boydell 2018)

It is also important not to lose sight of the original point behind punk's *do-it-yourself* ideology

– the fact that everyone could play a part in determining the culture they wanted to be a part of  
– and the ways in which that contribution might be valued in relation to more than just design and aesthetic quality. The key punk principle that ‘anyone can do it’ can’t simply be judged on the success of its commercially successful scene ‘leaders’, and that principle applies as much to its design strategies as it does to the music.

### **An Amateur Punk Aesthetic**

These home made artefacts can be viewed as products of subcultural participation and belonging, as an individual’s response to punk’s call to arms and as markers of possession. They can also tell us a lot about punk’s ‘natural’ visual language. The ‘ransom note’ typographic stereotype, a convention that quickly fell out of favour within professional punk graphic design fields due to its close association with one group – the Sex Pistols – appears to have retained a greater impact among fans producing their own amateur graphic responses to the subculture. This is perhaps due to the relative accessibility, and apparent simplicity, of the design method – though in practice the process requires a degree of compositional skill and aesthetic judgement to be really effective, as many amateur punk designers were to discover. Collage, along with the simple, hand-rendered typography favoured by early punk fanzine producers, also features heavily within these fan artefacts. Indeed, part of the power of at least some punk graphic conventions stems from their perceived simplicity and the ease with which they may be copied or mimicked by fans without the need for sophisticated tools or artistic skills. Perhaps the irony here is that a number of professional graphic designers working within the punk subculture embraced methods that deliberately projected a sense of immediacy and ‘do-it-yourself’ amateurism while, in turn, amateur, untrained fans tried to emulate those styles as punk’s ‘authentic’ visual voice: a kind of cross-relational process of punk aesthetics where designers further up the hierarchy are trying to mimic the efforts of those further down and vice versa. However, in many cases those professional graphic designers applied their compositional skills and design sensibilities in order to communicate more effectively, even while retaining a sense of ‘punk’ rawness and urgency, something that many of the amateur copyists failed to comprehend. Whether or not these home-made artefacts ever achieve ‘collectable’ or archive status, they do go some way to demonstrate the trickle down effect of punk graphic conventions, along with the use – and abuse – of records as ephemeral, consumable objects.



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### Footnotes

- i Such interventions can be compared to comics fanzines, where fan art was encouraged and fans would copy comics artists, but also the logos of the big companies such Marvel and DC Comics.
- ii The *Spunk* bootleg album comprised demo versions of many early Sex Pistols songs that would go on to be re-recorded for the official debut album, *Never Mind The Bollocks*. *Spunk* went on sale just prior to the release of *Never Mind The Bollocks*, and Sex Pistols manager Malcolm McLaren was widely rumoured to have been behind its release.